

Devotional Studies No. 21

Sunday Gatherings

As one approaches the subject of attendance each week with the assembled saints, one treads upon unsettled soil. Many people look upon church attendance as something that is not very important in their lives. “I just prefer to do my own thing” is the reaction of many toward the church. Others respond, “I just prefer to worship God in my own way.” Others are quick to reply: “I just worship at my home.” During my fifty-five years of ministry, I have observed that Sunday meetings are not very important to many believers. For instance, Sunday is a day to visit relatives or friends; Sunday is a day to go hunting; Sunday is a day to go fishing; Sunday is a day to sleep late. Sunday is almost a day for everything except God! Is Sunday essential in your spiritual life? If not, it should be!

As one reflects upon the gathering of Christians, one recalls the words of the author of Hebrews as he sought to nip-in-the-bud the attitude of some concerning the importance of gathering to encourage one another: “Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (**Hebrews 10:25**). “The Day approaching” is not Sunday but rather AD 70—the destruction of Jerusalem. In spite of danger to one’s life, they were still told not to abandon the habit of meeting together. Are Christians no longer obligated to meet together? What is this Scripture saying to you? In the first century, Christians were facing untold dangers by assembling, but they were told not to abandon, that is to say, give up, the practice of meeting together. Today, Christians are not abandoning the assembly for fear of punishment but rather from a lack of concern for spiritual things. In all fairness to the text, one must state that there is a difference between an occasional miss and one who actually gives up the assembly.

Apparently, many who profess Christ seek to be secret disciples of Jesus. Just a brief reflection upon this unhealthy attitude reveals that discipleship kills secrecy or secrecy kills discipleship. In the early church, Christians did not live in isolation from each other, but rather in fellowship with each other. Jesus, in establishing His own community of believers, put an end to the solitariness of the individual. As believers, we live not only for ourselves, but we also live for the sake of others. If one wishes to remain strong in Jesus, one cannot neglect or abandon the fellowship of the church. Why is church attendance important? Church attendance demonstrates to the world as well as to other Christians where one’s loyalty lies. When one gathers with the saints, this

attendance gives one a chance to show which side he or she is on. Can one live a Christian life and abandon the fellowship of the church?

Sunday gatherings should be a time of delight. In **Hebrews 10:25**, as cited above, the writer reveals one of the purposes in meeting together: “encourage one another.” This activity is the duty of every believer. When Christians assemble, they come together to encourage or be encouraged. They also gather in order to feast upon God’s written revelation. The words of Eliphaz to Job still ring as true today for Christians as it did in Job’s day. Listen to the words of Eliphaz: “Think how you have instructed many, how you have strengthened feeble hands. ⁴Your words have supported those who stumbled; you have strengthened faltering knees” (**Job 4:3-4**). The assembly of God’s people is one place where individuals find comfort and strength for “faltering knees.”

What is your custom, or habit, about the Sunday meetings? Do you imitate Christ in your willingness to meet with God’s people on a regular basis? What is your practice about the public assembly of God’s people? What custom, or routine, did Jesus have concerning the day set aside for God’s people to fellowship and to hear the Word of God read? Listen to Luke as he captures the pattern of Jesus regarding the Sabbath: “He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. ¹⁷ The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him” (**Luke 4:16-17a**). Why do many Christians today fail or neglect to observe this custom? The answer lies in the fact that far too many Christians are too involved with the pleasures of the world

Remember, faithfulness in church attendance encourages others and provokes to good works as well as to identify whose side you are on. Church membership and attendance are outward symbols of one’s inner commitment to Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, far too many Christians are just nominal members. Even though these believers are sincere, yet they are superficially Christian. Their faith is shallow; they have very little spiritual history; they are not growing in spiritual insight; and they are spiritually asleep. They are “neither hot nor cold” (**Revelation 3:16**). One who regards church attendance on Sunday as an optional matter is not seriously interested in the new life in Christ. Sunday attendance should never depend simply upon one’s own impulse, notion, whim, fancy, or personal convenience.

Having written the above, one must ever be conscious that church “going” is not the very heart of Christianity even though it is important. In other words, church attendance can be, if one is not careful, a sign of weakness rather than a sign of spiritual strength. Just going to church without a commitment to Christ is of no avail. One should attend church, or assembly, because of one’s commitment to the cause of Christ. During my ministry, I have heard countless Christians express their views about Sunday: “I have done my duty for the week.” Christianity is more than just church attendance. The church must be a fellowship of the committed. This is because mere belief is never enough. For one to be effective in God’s kingdom, the church must play an important role in the lives of God’s people. Without the Body of Christ, one cannot reach Christian vitality in its fullness. Commitment to Christ will not be effective apart from a committed fellowship. Men and women need the fellowship of the church because they are weak and sinful. What do the following words of Jesus mean to you: **“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well”**?

